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Poultry Profit Pointers
Health Maintenance

EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
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Poultry Profit Pointers

HEALTH MAINTENANCE
by
Elvin C. Schultz

POULTRY HEALTH

The health of a poultry flock can mean the difference between profit and loss. At least 15% of all chickens hatched in the United States die from disease before completing a laying year.

The first rule of health is sanitation. Proper nutrition is the second rule and third rule of health is good surroundings, that is, roomy, comfortable well-ventilated poultry houses.

SANITATION

There is no health measure more important than sanitation. Chicks or pouls should never be placed in quarters that have not been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected. The same applies to older birds. Careful cleaning of the quarters by removal of dirt, filth, and rubbish is the first step in preparing quarters for new birds. The thoroughness of this operation connected with the ability to secure healthy birds will greatly influence success in preventing disease. After the cleaning has been completed a good disinfectant should be used. Care should be taken to select a disinfectant that is made for
use in poultry houses. Most dips are not satisfactory as they are not intended to kill bacteria. Read and follow the directions on the label of the container.

MEDICATION

Many new drugs are available for the treatment of the poultry flock when a disease outbreak occurs. Included in this group are the sulfonamides (sulfas), arsenicals, antibiotics, nicotine and phenothiazine. Intelligent use of these drugs to avoid improper medication and useless expense dictates that the flock owner secure a correct diagnosis of the trouble in his flock. Several birds showing typical symptoms of the disease should be taken to an individual or laboratory qualified to make such examinations and diagnoses.

Most of the commercial poultry feeds now contain one or more drugs. It should be remembered that the level of the drug in these feeds is intended to aid in the prevention of disease when used under favorable (good sanitation and management) conditions and not as a cure.

VACCINATION

Vaccination is a means of increasing the resistance of poultry to disease-producing organisms. It is recommended that vaccination not be undertaken unless (1) the disease is known to be on the farm; (2) the disease is in the immediate neighborhood or (3) if the flock is to be used to produce hatching eggs.
Highly effective vaccines have been prepared for the prevention of Newcastle disease, infectious bronchitis, fowl pox and infectious larngotracheitis. It must be remembered that these vaccines contain the live virus and by using them the virus is introduced into the flock.

When vaccination is indicated these general recommendations should be followed: vaccinate only healthy birds, avoid sudden changes in the management of the flock, continue to practice good sanitation, and follow closely the directions of the manufacturer.

LICE AND MITES

Lice and mites cause a constant irritation of the skin and body. This irritation results in restlessness and in turn interferes with food consumption and assimilation. Reduced food use will cause a reduction in growth rate and egg production.

Some of the common material used to control lice and mites are: nicotine sulfate, lindane, DDT and malathion. These are all highly poisonous and extreme care should be taken to follow the directions accompanying them.

INTERNAL PARASITES

Internal parasites of poultry do not ordinarily cause a high death loss, but may affect birds in an insidious manner. Because of this it
is difficult to estimate the monetary loss which they cause. It is well known that heavy worm infestations will effect growth and egg production, and consequently increase feed costs materially.

Prevention of worm infection in the flock by sanitary management practices is much more satisfactory than attempting to control them by use of drugs. Range rotation and good litter management combined with the elimination of flies by use of screen, sprays and baits will do much to reduce the danger from worms.

If worm infestation is suspected take or send typical birds to some one qualified to determine their presence and identify them. There are two types of worm commonly found in poultry. They are roundworms, the most common, and tapeworms. The type present and the degree of infection will determine the treatment which should be employed to eliminate them.

CANNIBALISM - DEBEAKING

Cannibalism takes a heavy toll each year in the poultry flocks. Many flock owners state that the mortality from cannibalism is greater than any other single factor.

The best method of controlling cannibalism is by debeaking. This a practice of taking off part of the upper beak of the bird. This removes the part they pinch and tear flesh with, making it extremely difficult for them to be cannibalistic. The process can
be accomplished with an electric debeaker, using a hot blade that cauterizes the wound as it cuts, preventing excessive bleeding.

Debeaking can be done at any age, and is not considered harmful to the birds.

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